

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 11613

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, IV
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION WITH NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT YACE

BEGIN SUMMARY: IN MY INITIAL CALL ON PHILIPPE YACE WHO
AS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT IS DESIGNATED HEIR TO
HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY, I FOUND HIM REMARKABLY FRANK AND
FORTHCOMING. HE APPEARED IN GOOD HEALTH ALTHOUGH STILL
CONVALESCING FROM HIS SERIOUS ILLNESS LAST SUMMER. OUR
CONVERSATION WAS WIDE-RANGING AND YACE WAS FRIENDLY AND
OUTSPOKEN. HE MENTIONED INTER ALIA: ECOWAS (AND SAID
THE NEW EXECUTIVE SECRETARY WOULD BE BOUBACAR OUATTARA, A
PROMINENT IVORIAN BANK OFFICIAL AND GOOD FRIEND OF THIS
EMBASSY); THE FUTURE OF IVORY COAST AFTER HOUPHOUET-
BOIGNY; RUMORS OF YACE'S ALLEGED ANTI-FRENCH ATTITUDE
AND THE REASONS THEREFORE; AND THE PROBLEMS OF THIS
COUNTRY'S YOUNGER GENERATION AND THEIR FRUSTRATION AND
IMPATIENCE IN FINDING THE TOP POSITIONS TO WHICH THEY
WOULD LIKE TO ASPIRE UNAVAILABLE FOR THE TIME BEING AND
PROBABLY MANY YEARS. END SUMMARY.

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1. AFTER AN EXCHANGE OF PLEASANTRIES, I ASKED YACE HIS

VIEWS ON REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN WEST AFRICA. YACE FELT THIS WAS MOVING AHEAD SMOOTHLY AND WELL. HE SPOKE OF THE EEC/ACP MEETING JUST CONCLUDED IN LOME AND SAID THAT ANGLOPHONE-FRANCOPHONE COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING WAS IMPROVING. ONE PROBLEM HE SAID HAD BEEN THE ATTITUDE OF FORMER COLONIAL POWERS IN AFRICA. HE ARGUED THAT THE BRITISH HAD KEPT THEMSELVES RELATIVELY ALOOF AND SEPARATE FROM BLACK AFRICANS, WHO IN TURN WERE SUSPICIOUS AND DISTRUSTFUL IN DEALINGS WITH WHITES. (HENCE, HE SAID, THE DIFFICULTIES THE ANC HAD IN DEALING WITH THE SMITH REGIME AT THE GENEVA TALKS.) THE FRENCH, HOWEVER, HAD TRIED TO ASSIMILATE AFRICANS INTO THE FRENCH COMMUNITY SO THAT FRANCOPHONE AFRICANS WERE ACCUSTOMED TO OPEN ARGUMENT AND EXCHANGE WITH EUROPEANS. AS AN EXAMPLE, YACE CITED HOUPHOUET'S REFUSAL OF DE GAULLE'S SUGGESTION THAT IVORY COAST SHOULD FOLLOW FRANCE IN RECOGNIZING COMMUNIST CHINA. HOUPHOUET HAD REPLIED THAT IVORY COAST WAS NOT YET STRONG ENOUGH TO EXPOSE ITSELF TO THE POSSIBLY MALIGN INFLUENCE OF SO GREAT A COMMUNIST POWER AND WOULD NOT BE READY TO RECOGNIZE THE PRC UNTIL ITS INSTITUTIONS WERE READY TO RESIST ANY SUBVERSIVE BLANDISHMENTS. COMMENT: YACE'S DISCUSSION OF IVORY COAST WOULD SUGGEST VERY CONSIDERABLE CONFIDENCE IN THESE INSTITUTIONS. END COMMENT.

2. SPEAKING OF ECOWAS, YACE SAID IT WAS OFF TO A GOOD START. HE SAID THAT BOUBACAR OUATTARA, HEAD OF THE INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR WEST AFRICA (BIAO) WOULD BE THE IVORIAN NOMINEE FOR EXECUTIVE SECRETARY RESIDENT IN LAGOS. COMMENT: THIS APPOINTMENT HAS NOT YET BEEN REVEALED PUBLICLY AND THE INFORMATION SHOULD BE PROTECTED UNTIL IT IS. OUATTARA IS A VERY ABLE INDIVIDUAL AND A CLOSE FRIEND OF THIS EMBASSY. WE WILL SEND MORE DETAILS SEPTEL. END COMMENT. YACE URGED THE UNITED STATES TO SUPPORT ECOWAS, PARTICULARLY ITS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE INSTITUTIONS, SINCE HE SAID WITHOUT SUCH INSTITUTIONS THE PARTICIPATING NATIONS WOULD HAVE LITTLE TO COOPERATE ABOUT. HE ALSO WARNED AGAINST THE POLITICIZATION OF ECOWAS IN TERMS SIMILAR TO THOSE USED LAST WEEK AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY BY CHEF DE CABINET NOUAMA WHEN MEETING WITH AF/W DIRECTOR SMITH. IF ECOWAS WERE TO

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SUCCEED, HE SAID, IT COULD NOT PERMIT ITSELF TO BE SIDE-TRACKED BY A DOCTRINAIRE APPROACH TO ECONOMIC PROBLEMS THAT REQUIRED CAREFUL ANALYSIS AND PRAGMATISM IF THEY WERE TO BE SOLVED.

3. SPEAKING FRANKLY ABOUT THE POSSIBLE DEMISE OF PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET, YACE SAID THERE WOULD BE NO

TRANSITION DIFFICULTIES SHOULD HOUPHOUET DIE OR LEAVE OFFICE. HOUPHOUET WAS CERTAINLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS COUNTRY'S INDEPENDENCE, HARMONY AND PROSPERITY BUT SINCE HOUPHOUET HAD NOT BEEN A DICTATOR AND HAD RATHER REPRESENTED THE CONSENSUS OF THE PEOPLE OF IVORY COAST, THE TRADITIONS AND INSTITUTIONS WHICH HOUPHOUET HAD ESTABLISHED WOULD READILY SURVIVE HIM. YACE MADE NO MENTION OF HIS PERSONAL FUTURE IN A POST-HOUPHOUET IVORY COAST BUT HIS CONFIDENT AIR SEEMED DESIGNED TO LEAVE NO DOUBT THAT HE EXPECTS TO FILL THE SHOES OF "LE VIEUX."

4. YACE MENTIONED THAT HE WAS OFTEN ACCUSED OF ANTI-FRENCH RACISM. ONE BRITISH JOURNALIST HAD DESCRIBED THESE ACCUSATIONS BUT SAID NO ONE COULD CITE AN INSTANCE IN WHICH YACE HAD BEEN DEMONSTRABLY ANTI-FRENCH. YACE SAID THE ORIGIN OF THESE RUMORS WAS HIS HAVING TAKEN THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PDCI/RDA IN 1958 WHEN HOUPHOUET WAS IN PARIS. SINCE THE GOAL OF THE PARTY WAS NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE FROM FRANCE, YACE SAID HE HAD BEEN TAGGED WITH AN ANTIFRENCH LABEL. HE WAS NOT ANTI-FRENCH BUT HE WAS DEFINITELY PRO-IVORIAN. YACE SPOKE ENTHUSIASTICALLY OF HIS SEVERAL TRIPS TO THE U.S. AND CHEERFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE WAS PRO-AMERICAN.

5. SPEAKING OF ATTITUDES TOWARD THE GOVERNMENT, YACE MENTIONED JEAN-BAPTISTE MOCKEY WHO HAD BEEN IMPRISONED FOR ALLEGED TREASON IN THE EARLY 60'S (YACE WAS CHIEF PROSECUTOR), THEN RELEASED AND PRESENTLY MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH. YACE SPOKE OPENLY OF HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH MOCKEY (THE TWO ARE BELIEVED TO BE BITTER ENEMIES) AND OF MOCKEY HAVING DIVORCED YACE'S SISTER. NEVERTHELESS, YACE SAID HE HAD BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR PERSUADING MOCKEY TO COME BACK INTO THE FOLD, JOIN THE POLITICAL BUREAU
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OF THE PARTY AND ACCEPT A CABINET PORTFOLIO. WHEN I ASKED WHETHER MOCKEY SHOULD NOW BE CONSIDERED PART OF THE ESTABLISHMENT, YACE DUCKED THE QUESTION WITH A GALLIC SHRUG.

6. YACE SPOKE AT LENGTH ABOUT PROBLEMS WITH YOUNGER EDUCATED IVORIANS. THEY WERE HE SAID IMPATIENT AND AMBITIOUS, FREQUENTLY FRUSTRATED AND EVEN ANGRY. THIS COULD NOT BE HELPED. YACE SAID HE WAS THE LAST OF THE OLD, DAKAR TRAINED GENERATION, ALL OF WHOM WERE NOW WELL OVER 50. THE NEXT GENERATION, GRADUATED LARGELY FROM ABIDJAN UNIVERSITY, WERE STILL IN THEIR EARLY 40'S -- YACE CITED MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, SAWADOGO AND MINISTER OF PLAN, DIAWARA. THESE WERE HIGHLY COMPETENT PEOPLE WHOSE TALENTS THE GOIC HAD NO INTENTION OF PUTTING

ASIDE. THIS MEANT THAT THE NEXT GENERATION, NOW THIRTYISH, COULD EXPECT TO WAIT A DECADE OR TWO BEFORE REPLACING THE PRESENT TOP ECHELON. THIS LED TO FRUSTRATION AND AT TIME WORSE. YACE MENTIONED THE CASE OF A NEPHEW OF FORMER CHIEF OF DEFENSE STAFF, D'AGUIN. THE NEPHEW ANXIOUS FOR ACCELERATED ADVANCEMENT HAD WRITTEN D'AQUIN OPENLY SUGGESTING A COUP D'ETAT. YACE SAID THE GOIC HAD INCARCERATED THE NEPHEW FOR A YEAR AND HE WAS NOW A CHASTENED AND PRODUCTIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY. HOWEVER, YACE SAID FIRMLY THAT THE YOUNGER GENERATION HAD TO LEARN PATIENCE, DISCIPLINE AND HARD WORK WHICH HAD PUT IVORY COAST AHEAD OF ITS NEIGHBORS ECONOMICALLY AND SHOULD KEEP IT THERE. HE WOULD, HE SAID, BE SPEAKING ON THIS POINT IN A SPEECH DIRECTED PRIMARILY AT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE NEXT WEEK.

7. CONCLUSION: YACE'S APPARENT CANDOR SURPRISED ME IN VIEW OF HIS REPUTATION FOR RESERVE AND INTROSPECTION. HIS APPROACHING SO DIRECTLY SUCH ISSUES AS HIS ANTI-FRENCH REPUTATION WOULD SUGGEST SOME THOUGHT AND PREPARATION PRIOR TO OUR MEETING. IF HIS HEALTH CONTINUES TO IMPROVE, HE WILL BE A PERSONALITY TO BE RECKONED WITH IN IVORY COAST, AND QUITE POSSIBLY ON A LARGER STAGE. IN THIS CONNECTION, HIS INTELLECTUAL VIGOR, VIVACITY AND INTEREST IN THE FUTURE DID NOT IN ANY WAY SUGGEST A MAN WHO WAS SERIOUSLY ILL -- AS HE
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HAS BEEN RUMORED TO BE -- MUCH LESS A MAN WHO DID NOT EXPECT TO REMAIN ACTIVE IN PUBLIC LIFE FOR SOME TIME TO COME.
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